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NOTES.

DAVID AMES WELLS.

DAVID AMES WELLS, who died November 5, 1898, filled a unique position in the economic field of this country, and his departure is a sad reminder of the diminishing ranks of the older generation of men who long exercised an important and wholesome influence on our national policy. Mr. Wells was born in Springfield, Massachusetts, on June 17, 1828, of the best New England stock. Indeed, his strict devotion to conscience and principle typified, while it also added luster to, the New England characteristics. He was graduated from Williams College in 1847, and early devoted himself to writing, being first engaged on the staff of the *Springfield Republican*. An inventive mind, also drawn to science, led him to graduate at the Lawrence Scientific School of Harvard in 1852, where he became assistant professor. Then he passed to the Lawrence Academy at Groton, Massachusetts, as an instructor in physics and chemistry. In 1857-8 he was connected with the publishing-house of G. P. Putnam & Co.

The period of the Civil War naturally drew to the front a brilliant, thinking man in his thirties like Mr. Wells, and practically directed his energies into the economic field. Among the men who rose to the emergency Mr. Wells was particularly distinguished. In 1864, in Troy, New York, where he was then living, he prepared a paper for a literary club on the debt, revenue, and credit of the United States, under the name of "Our Burden and Our Strength," of which some 200,000 copies were published and sold. President Lincoln, impressed by its quality, invited him to Washington, and in conference with him and Mr. Fessenden, then Secretary of the Treasury, on the fiscal situation, a Revenue Commission was established in 1865. This commission, of which Mr. Wells was appointed chairman by Secretary McCulloch, made an epoch in the fiscal and statistical work of our country. It was pioneering, far-sighted and unequaled of its kind. Scientific taxation—whatever of it we may be said to have—dates from the investigations of that commission. It was, also, Mr. Wells who brought about the establishment of the Bureau of Statistics and the

appointment of Francis A. Walker to the charge of it. On the expiration of the commission, Mr. Wells continued as Special Commissioner of Revenue for four years, during which time a prodigious work was accomplished in systematizing the internal taxes.

Empowered in 1867 by the Secretary of the Treasury to draft a new tariff law, Mr. Wells made an official visit to Europe to study manufactures. This visit changed him from a vigorous protectionist to an ardent free-trader, and, strange to say, his revised tariff bill actually passed the senate in 1867 by a vote of 27 to 10, and failed in the house by only a few votes. Horace Greeley arose in defense of protectionism against Mr. Wells' report in 1869, and in time the latter was refused reappointment by President Grant. This practically ended his official career, although it did not end his influence.

He was soon appointed chairman of a commission to examine into the local taxation of the State of New York, and his report is of the first importance. In 1872 he was invited to lecture at Yale, and was chosen a delegate to the Democratic national convention in that year, and again in 1880. Residing then in Norwich, Connecticut, in an overwhelmingly Republican district, he was defeated for Congress in 1876, and again in 1890, on the Democratic ticket. In 1876 he was made receiver of the Alabama and Chattanooga Railroad, restoring it to solvency in a very brief time. In 1878 he made an admirable report on canal tolls for the State of New York. He was selected as one of the trustees of the bondholders for reorganizing the Erie Railway, resulting in 1879 in his choice as one of a board of arbitration for the associated railways in matters of apportionment of earnings. When the question of government ownership of telegraphs was raised, he made an exhaustive study, arguing against government ownership.

Mr. Wells would gladly have repeated in America the career of Cobden; and he would have done it had conditions not been so adverse in the United States to a free-trade propaganda. This leadership brought him recognition abroad, and especially in England. In 1873 he was invited to deliver the annual address before the Cobden Club; became an honorary member of the Royal Statistical Society in 1871; was chosen foreign associate of the French Academy of Political Science in 1874, to fill a vacancy caused by the death of John Stuart Mill; was made a member in 1877 of the Regia Accademia dei Lincei of Italy; was president of the American Social Science Association in 1875, of the New London Historical Society in 1880, and of the

American Free Trade League in 1881. The degree of LL.D. was granted him by Williams College in 1871, and by Harvard University in 1890. In 1874 Oxford gave him the degree of D.C.L.

As he was an easy and rapid producer, a complete list of Mr. Wells' writings would be long. It must also be remembered that in his early years his bent was strongly toward science. He invented a machine for folding sheets to be used with the power printing press. Not only was he the author of the well-known *Science of Common Things*, but also of a series of scientific text-books, the one on chemistry having been adopted at West Point. Of his economic work, the most important and characteristic are, the *Reports of the Special Commissioner of Internal Revenue* (1866-1869), *Our Merchant Marine* (1882), *The Primer of Tariff Reform* (1884), *Principles of Taxation* (1886), and *Recent Economic Changes* (1889). It is no derogation to a writer who came on the scene before drastic training in economics was possible or required, to say that in some respects his work lacked scientific quality and depth. In his *Recent Economic Changes*, one of the most effective books of its kind, he was led astray by the over-production fallacy, although that lapse had little to do with the real value of the volume.

To his friends he was ever the open-hearted, ruggedly honest, high-minded and genial companion, always burning with zeal for the really important reforms of the day, always a fountain of interesting and exact knowledge, always helpful and sympathetic. He was persistent, painstaking, indefatigable in his hunt for facts. Whatever he lacked in systematic training was overbalanced by his practical instinct and good sense. In reality, he was a great statistician, and his mind had no bent for vague abstractions or for speculative discussions. It was his closeness to the facts of everyday life which gave him so great an influence with men. American economists can ill afford to lose so honest, so strong, so loyal an elder brother from their ranks.

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THE development of railway statistics in the United States, especially during the past decade has brought us to a point where the relations between the roads and the public are clearly shown. Statistics of operations set forth in great detail the work done and the pay received for doing it. The capitalization reports show the amount and kinds of stock and bonds and the dividends and interest paid.